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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 011611

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#) [FARC](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT URIBE ACCEPTS "INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION"  
SECURITY ZONE PROPOSAL FOR FARC TALKS; FARC RESPONSE PENDING

REF: A. BOGOTA 11461

[B.](#) BOGOTA 11435

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood.

Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

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Summary

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[¶](#)1. (C) President Uribe announced late on December 13 that the GOC has accepted an "international commission" (representatives from France, Switzerland, and Spain) suggestion to establish a 65 square mile "security zone" in the Valle del Cauca to conduct hostage exchange talks with the FARC. The international commission handed the proposal to the GOC and the FARC on December 13. Some 30 families live in the proposed security zone, a rural area that contains several small governmental facilities and a church. Uribe said the proposal contemplates 40 international observers in the security zone to verify that no armed actors are present, either GOC forces or guerrillas. The security zone would exist for seven days prior to any GOC-FARC meeting (to allow the FARC to get to the zone) and for seven days following the conclusion of the talks (to allow the FARC to leave). The International Committee of the Red Cross would observe the process, along with a committee representing the European facilitators. In a meeting with the Ambassador shortly before the public announcement, Uribe said his acceptance of the security zone was a concession, taken to demonstrate the GOC's good faith approach to FARC talks. Uribe said the security zone would be significantly different from former President Pastrana's demilitarized zone ("despeje") because Colombian sovereignty and law would remain in effect and there would be no armed guerrilla presence allowed. The GOC's principal concession would be to withdraw the armed forces from the area for the duration of the talks. If talks get underway, Uribe said he would not accept any FARC hostage exchange offer that excluded the three U.S. citizen hostages. The FARC has not yet replied to the European proposal.

[¶](#)2. (C) With regard to the GOC-ELN peace process, Uribe told the Ambassador that ELN military commander Antonio Garcia had not yet arrived in Cuba to head the ELN delegation. Uribe said he would be careful not to say anything in the coming days (including during his December 15 trip to New York) that would give Garcia an excuse not to attend the Havana talks. Uribe said Garcia was apparently traveling to Cuba from Venezuela so that he could arrive "in a dignified manner." (Press accounts December 14 report that Garcia has now arrived in Havana.) The GOC's initial objective during the Havana talks would be to keep the ELN at the table. Turning to the paramilitary peace process, Uribe said negotiations on extradition was not and would not be on the table. U.S. pressure on extraditions had helped him deal with the paramilitary leaders. The December 12 demobilization of almost 2,000 members of the Central Bolivar Bloc (BCB) was important; BCB leader Macaco was now like "a bird whose wings had been cut off." Demobilized paramilitaries are easier to deal with than those who retain command structures and military equipment, he said. End summary.

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Uribe Accepts Facilitators' Proposal

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[¶](#)3. (C) President Uribe announced during a press conference at 8PM on December 13 that he had accepted a proposal by three European facilitators (representatives from France, Switzerland, and Spain) to establish a 65 square mile "security zone" in a rural area in south east Valle del Cauca, bordering Tolima Department, to conduct hostage exchange talks with the FARC (see septel for full text of Uribe's remarks and full text of the facilitators' proposal). The "international commission" was formed recently to explore mechanisms to facilitate such talks. According to the GOC, about 30 families currently live in the security zone, which also contains some governmental facilities (a school, clinic, community center, and soccer field) and a church. Uribe said the GOC had agreed to withdraw security forces from the security zone during any talks with the FARC, and for a period of seven days prior and subsequent to the meeting. The proposal states that the FARC are not permitted to have armed guerrillas in the security zone. Instead, some

40 international observers would be present to monitor developments and verify compliance. (It is unclear how the international observers would be selected.) Other than GOC and FARC negotiators and the international observers, the only people authorized to be in the security zone during the negotiation period would be the International Committee of the Red Cross, which is providing logistical support, and a committee representing the facilitators.

14. (C) Uribe told Ambassador Wood and Carl Meacham of SFRC staff shortly before making his public announcement that he was accepting the proposed security zone to demonstrate he was acting in good faith. Uribe hoped the FARC would accept the European proposal; if they did not, "we will have to be very firm with them," he said. In any event, he expressed the belief that the proposal would put the FARC on the defensive. Uribe emphasized that the security zone was significantly different from the demilitarized zone ("despeje") that former President Pastrana established. Uribe said in the security zone, unlike in Pastrana's despeje, Colombian sovereignty and law would continue to apply and no armed FARC guerrillas would be permitted. (The Pastrana despeje allowed the FARC to assume control of a territory the size of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island combined.) Uribe described his acceptance of the European proposal as a "concession," that contradicted his previous statements on the issue, but that was required to move the process forward. Uribe underscored to the Ambassador that he would not accept any FARC hostage exchange offer that omitted the three U.S. citizen hostages. The FARC, which also apparently received the European proposal on December 13, has not yet replied.

15. (C) Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo briefed ambassadors on FARC, ELN, and paramilitary peace process developments at an emergency G24 meeting December 12. With respect to the FARC, Restrepo said representatives of the international commission had been in Colombia scouting for venues for talks. So far, the FARC is accepting the Commission's role, which the GOC prefers because it cuts off other channels, such as the Church or ex-presidents that the FARC could turn to for a better deal or to neutralize GOC efforts. (The French MFA released a statement last weekend to the effect that the commission's work was independent, apparently designed to reassure the FARC that the commission was not a tool of the GOC. Restrepo, in contrast, told a group of ambassadors that the facilitators had agreed to follow the GOC lead.) Restrepo appears convinced that unless there is some sort of FARC process in place, the ELN initiative will eventually fail because the "big brother" will prevent the "little brother" from closing on any deal.

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France, Betancourt Allies Welcome GOC Acceptance  
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16. (U) A French Foreign Ministry spokesperson said December 14 that France "received with interest the Colombian Government's positive response" to the facilitators' proposal, and confirmed that France "is waiting on the FARC's response, which we hope will be positive." Spokespersons for supporters of hostage and dual French-Colombian citizen Ingrid Betancourt (held since February 2002) praised the GOC decision to accept the proposal and urged the FARC to accept the same terms.

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The GOC's Strategy at the ELN Talks in Cuba  
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17. (C) Uribe told the Ambassador that the GOC aimed to "keep the ELN talking at the negotiating table" during the upcoming Havana talks (refs A, B). He said he understood that ELN military commander Antonio Garcia had not yet arrived in Cuba from Venezuela. Garcia wanted to arrive "with dignity," Uribe said, but his apparent non-arrival gave Uribe pause. Uribe would be very cautious in the coming days (including during his December 15 private trip to New York) not to say anything that would give Garcia an excuse not to show up in Havana. (Press accounts December 14 show photographs of Garcia in Havana.)

18. (C) The Ambassador underlined to Uribe his December 9 comments to the ELN "Peace House" facilitators (ref A): the ELN should not get a deal that went beyond Justice and Peace law provisions. If they did, they would essentially be negotiating on behalf of the paramilitaries, because the GOC would then be obliged to offer the paramilitaries the same deal. Uribe agreed, saying that Colombian law requires similarly situated people to be treated the same way; one group of illegal armed actors could not get a better deal than the others. He said many had criticized the Justice and Peace law as bland and as lacking real sanctions. Now, however, the paramilitaries are complaining it is too tough and some say the ELN and FARC will never accept its tough

terms.

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Paramilitary Peace Process  
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19. (C) Referring to the December 12 demobilization of almost 2,000 members of the paramilitary Central Bolivar Bloc, including its leader Macaco, Uribe told the Ambassador and Meacham it was easier to confront the paramilitaries after they had demobilized than when they still had a command structure and significant weapons. (Macaco's group turned in two helicopters in working order, both fitted with 50mm machine guns, as well as over 1,200 rifles, over 500 grenades, 13 rockets, and a large quantity of assorted caliber ammunition; Uribe said Macaco was now "like a bird whose wings had been cut off.") In response to Meacham's question, Uribe said he had not and would not negotiate extradition with paramilitaries; the subject was not and would not be on the table. Uribe would decide at a later date whether to extradite Don Berna to the U.S. He would base his decision in part on Don Berna's complete compliance with Justice and Peace law requirements, including full disclosure of crimes and handing over of assets. If Don Berna failed to comply, Colombian public opinion would support Uribe's decision to extradite him ("si no cumple, se va"). Uribe emphasized that he had created 384 enemies with extradition decisions, referring to the families of those he has extradited from Colombia, most to the U.S. Uribe said U.S. pressure on extraditions had helped him to deal with the paramilitaries.

WOOD